



2004

Steve Geller

DISTRICT 31 LEGISLATIVE REPORT FROM THE FLORIDA SENATE

Dear Friends,

Once again, we had a very challenging session in Tallahassee. While the Florida Legislature clashed on some matters, we agreed on many issues that are featured in this newsletter.

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- *Transportation*

As our troops are engaged overseas, I began to examine how the Florida Legislature could better assist the brave men and women serving our nation, as well as those who have served in the past. I introduced a bill that would create a matching grant fund to provide financial assistance to our troops' families. I also introduced a bill, which was passed by the Florida Legislature, that would have given our State's veterans the tools to raise much needed funds. Unfortunately, the matching grant bill failed to pass, and the veterans' bill was vetoed by Governor Bush. Nevertheless, a healthy debate was initiated regarding our nation's troops and veterans.

Condominium elections have been a hot issue throughout the State, especially here in South Florida. To address possible claims of fraud, I introduced legislation, which was amended onto the condominium legislative package, that would allow a new ombudsman to appoint someone to conduct elections for condominium boards of directors.

Last year, Reuters reported on a bridge in Florida that contained a significant racial slur in its name. Like most people, I was offended. I introduced legislation that would require a survey of place names and the removal any racial, ethnic, or religious slurs.

Thank you for taking an interest in our State Government. I invite you to read about this recent session, and I welcome your comments. Please call or email my office and let me know what is on your mind so that I can better represent you. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to serve as your State Senator.

Sincerely,

State Senator, District 31

2004

key legislation sponsored by Florida Senator Steve Geller

Senator Steven Geller is Chairman of the Senate on the Banking and Insurance, Finance and Taxation and Transportation Committees.

SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS

Over the past few months, it has been hard to turn on your television without seeing an elected official posing for a photo-op with a member

of our armed forces. Lately, leaders of both major political parties have been tripping over themselves to appear before cameras with our troops. Unfortunately,

most politicians fail to back their words of praise with any meaningful action of support.

This year, I introduced legislation that would create a Citizen Soldier Matching Grant Program. The program would award matching grants to private sector employers in this state who pay employees serving overseas the amount of their private salary minus their military pay. In order to be eligible for these funds, an employee must be serving in the United States Armed Forces Reserves or the Florida National Guard and must be on active duty. Private employers would not be required to participate in the program, simply encouraged to do so.

In addition to dodging bullets and risking their lives, members of the Armed Reserves and National Guard

who are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan must also worry about their obligations at home. Currently, we are experiencing a dip in enlistment in our Armed Reserves and National Guard. Not only are we failing to recruit new men and women, but those returning from overseas are refusing to reenlist when their tours of duty are completed. While this trend may be attributed largely to the increased violence faced overseas, it is also due to the fact that we do not provide our troops with the financial means to serve. Unfortunately due to fiscal concerns, the bill was defeated in the Florida Legislature; however, I intend to file the bill again next year.

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

Over the past few years, the federal government has slashed services and funds to the Veterans Administration, and further cuts have been proposed for the future. Our nation's veterans have voiced their displeasure and disappointment, and they have asked that the State of Florida not ignore their needs.

This year, state veterans groups, along with various charities and religious organizations from throughout Florida, have asked Tallahassee for the right to use pull-tab instant bingo cards in their halls where they currently play bingo, so additional funds may be raised. This bill was the top priority of the State's veterans groups. The Legislature

overwhelmingly passed the bill in a bipartisan fashion, with the Florida Senate actually passing the legislation twice; however, Governor Jeb Bush, despite pleas by the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, vetoed the bill. I intend to file this bill again next year.

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO FLY OLD GLORY

Regardless of how one may feel toward this country's current foreign policy, all Americans support the brave men and women serving abroad, and we each have our distinct way of showing our support. For two particular residents of Boynton Beach, they chose to proudly fly an American flag in the window of their apartment. Unfortunately, the managers of their property disagreed with their display of patriotism and instructed the removal of the American flag because it violated the couple's lease and community rules.

I disagreed with the decision by management, and following the reports in the newspaper, I filed legislation to protect a resident's right to freely display the American flag. Fortunately, the Florida Legislature passed this important bill, and Floridians can now fly Old Glory in apartments throughout Florida, free from restrictions by overzealous apartment managers.



Sen. Geller outside the Senate Chambers in the Capitol.

Comprehensive Planning Committee and serves tion, Regulated Industries, Rules and Calendar,

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF CONDOMINIUM ELECTIONS

One of the most common complaints that I receive in my district office is regarding elections for condominium boards of directors. Many times, unit owners are concerned that these important elections are not being held in a fair and democratic manner. I believe that condominium boards are similar to local governments, and their integrity must be maintained.

This session, the Florida Legislature passed a condominium bill that, among other things, would create a Condominium Ombudsman Office. I introduced legislation, which was successfully amended onto the condominium bill, that would require the ombudsman to appoint someone to conduct a condominium board election if petitioned by 15% of all voting interests or 6 unit owners, whichever number is greater. This process will protect the integrity of our condominium boards and preserve the democratic process in those elections.

REMOVING OFFENSIVE NAMES FROM FLORIDA'S MAPS

Last year, Reuters reported a bridge in Florida that used a significant racial slur in its name. I was shocked and appalled to discover that remnants of a darker time still existed on the geographical maps of this great State. I felt that this problem needed to be addressed, and the Florida Legislature agreed.

I introduced legislation, which was passed by the Florida Legislature, that will require the Florida Department of State to conduct a survey of all place names in our State. Any place name that contains a racial, ethnic, or religious slur will be removed, and the State will work with the local government to determine an alternative name.

I felt very strongly that the State clean up our maps, but not attempt to rewrite history. The wording of this legislation was narrowly drawn so that the rich history of this State, including both the good and the bad, will

be preserved for our children and grandchildren to learn and appreciate. I was pleased to report on the day of passage that the bill was supported by a wide array of groups, ranging from civil rights organizations to the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

PROTECTING HOMEOWNERS AGAINST NEGLIGENCE

Many homeowners in Florida have entered into agreements with their mortgage companies so they make one payment a month and the lender is responsible for paying the taxes and insurance premiums on the property. Unfortunately, there have been cases when the mortgage company has failed to make the appropriate payments to insurance companies as required by the mortgage agreement. As a result, numerous homeowners have had their insurance coverage dropped as a result of the negligence of their mortgage company. Essentially, the homeowners have been punished for no wrongdoing of their own.



I introduced legislation, which was amended onto larger insurance and financial services bills, that would require an insurance company to reinstate the policy of a homeowner when the failure to pay a premium is made by the mortgage company and not the homeowner. Additionally, the mortgage company would be responsible for the payment of any fees or penalties due to their failure to make an insurance payment. In cases when the policy is not reinstated, the mortgage company will be responsible for paying the difference between the cost of the previous insurance policy and a new, comparable policy for a period of two years.

*Sen. Geller in
the Senate
during the 2004
legislative
session.*



Senator Steve Geller

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Important Telephone Numbers

Adoption Information	(800) 962-3678	Consumer Complaints	(800) 435-7352	Insurance Hotline	(800) 342-2762
AIDS Hotline (English)	(800) 352-2437	Dept. of Revenue (Taxpayers)	(800) 352-3671	Lifeline Telephone Rate	(800) 540-7039
AIDS Hotline (Spanish)	(800) 545-7432	Dept. of Veterans' Services	(800) 827-1000	One Church, One Child	(888) 283-0886
Airline Safety Components	(800) 322-7873	Discrimination in Housing/Employment		Organ Donors (The Living Bank)	(800) 528-2971
Alzheimer's Association	(800) 272-3900		(800) 342-8170	Poison Information	(800) 222-1222
Banking & Finance	(800) 848-3792	Division of Blind Services	(800) 342-1828	Public Service Commission	(800) 342-3552
Cancer Information	(800) 422-6237	Elder Helpline	(800) 262-2243	Social Security Hotline	(800) 772-1213
Child Find America	(800) 426-5678	Family source/Parent Helpline	(800) 352-5683	Storm Insurance	(800) 227-8676
Child Support Hotline	(800) 622-5437	Foster Care Review	(305) 573-6665	US Coast Guard	(800) 424-8802
Children/Adult Abuse Hotline	(800) 962-2873	Guardian Ad Litem	(305) 638-6861	Worker's Compensation Claims	(800) 342-1741
Consumer Product Safety	(800) 638-2772	Hurricane Hotline	(800) 342-7940		

Hurricane Preparedness Tips

A Hurricane can be one of nature's most dangerous phenomenon's, but with preparation, much tragedy can be avoided. Hurricane season runs from the beginning of June to the end of November. Do not wait for the season to begin or for a storm to be forecast to begin your preparations. Take some time now to prepare your family for a violent storm.

>> As a Hurricane is approaching, it is most important that you be alert.. Keep a close watch on the weather reports but be careful not to listen to rumors.

>> Make sure that you do not get stranded when the storm hits. Stay clear of low lying coastal regions, which may become flooded by the storm surge.

>> As the storm approaches, board up your windows with plywood. If storm

shutters have not been installed, reinforce doors with 3/4 inch plywood. Placing tape on windows does not help.

>> Be sure to always have a store of non-perishable foods that can be eaten without cooking, as gas and electricity may be knocked out by a storm. The storage of drinking water is also a necessity.

>> Make sure that you have flashlights with fresh batteries. Do not use candles or kerosene lamps. Also, fill your bathtub with water that can be used for flushing the toilet. Be sure that your car has a full tank of gas, as you may not be able to obtain gas after the storm.

>> Take an inventory of your home. It is recommended that you make a videotape of your possessions for Insurance purposes.

>> If you live in a mobile home, it is imperative that you leave. These homes are highly susceptible to winds.

>> If you have a boat, it should be properly moored or moved to a safe area.

During the hurricane it is best to stay in your house, if possible. A sturdy house is a good place to weather the storm. The safest side is the down wind area and away from windows. Attempt to go outdoors for repairs only when absolutely necessary and with extreme caution. The best time to do this is during the eye when the winds die down, although this is temporary and the winds will return from the opposite direction. Again, stay indoors unless an evacuation order is given. Travel is hazardous with the winds and tides whipping through the area.

After the storm has passed, danger still abounds. Beware of damage utilities. Loose electrical lines and broken gas

mains may cause many lives to be lost. Avoid these, and if spotted call the proper authorities. Take care when walking or driving. The debris on the streets may harbor poisonous snakes and insects. Roads may be weakened by washout and may collapse. Beware of spoiled food. If power is out for a few days, food may spoil. Do not drink the water until official word is given. Boil water before use. Be extremely careful not to do anything that may cause a fire, as water pressure is low and fire crews will have a difficult time putting them out.

I hope this column is helpful in helping you to get prepared for this hurricane season. Hurricanes are an all too real danger for the residents of South Florida. Please take the time now, to protect you and your family from any dangers that may arise.

Important numbers

Broward County Emergency Management	954-831-3900	Broward County Special Needs Registry	954-357-2888	Florida Department of Insurance	800-342-2762
Hurricane hotline (Bus Pick-Up Points, Etc.)	954-831-4000	American Red Cross	954-797-3800	Broward Public Insurance Adjuster	954-524-4963
Florida Power & Light (FPL)	954-797-5000	Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	800-462-9029	National Flood Insurance	800-462-9029